

244 and for that reason yams, especially the air tuber yam, are frequently planted with ngon. In general, the only edible part of the yam is the rhizome, and in the case of the air tuber yams, only the air tubers which all fall off at the same time when they are ripe. This has given rise to a symbolic custom practiced when the children eat yam.

788 For instance, when the three sons of one mother eat yams, the first nudges the second, and the latter nudges the third, as a sign that they wish to die after one another, as is natural, and not all on the same day, like the air tubers.

Considerably less can be said of the third group than of the first and second groups. The chief plant belonging to it is cassava or manioc, Manihot utilissima Pohl (mbūn I). The times for /Fig. 54 appears here in the original text/ the cultivation of cassava are as follows:

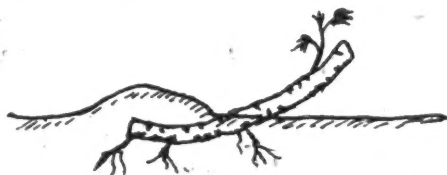


Fig. 54. Cassava Shoot.

782 vūēn esēb = long dry season (December to February), felling the trees on the farm;

šōgō esēb = short rainy season (March to May), planting the shoots;

ojuṇ = the rainy half of the year.

In the following esēb, in other words, from January of the following year on, that is, seven months after transplanting, harvesting may begin, and it may extend over an arbitrary period of time since the plant is a perennial.

789 There are no medicines for the growth of cassava as there are for the groundnut and ngon. The prayer of the Pangwe -- an ancient one in new guise -- would be: "Dear God, let the groundnut and ngon flourish, cassava grows by itself!" Cassava has comparatively few enemies; only goats and sheep-like to eat the leaves. There is a species of grasshopper (mbāāsān III) which descends in

754 the évu or the animal employed as assistant being killed during a skirmish, which would bring about the nnem's death.

Many people nevertheless regard these disadvantages as weighing little against the immediate advantages which the évu procures. Therefore some bemie (people without évu) have themselves initiated into ngbwel, and some beyem dedicate their children from birth (which has the additional effect of protecting them against the parent's évu). For this purpose beyem organize into secret societies (and these are really secret societies), well described by Trilles and particularly so by Lavignotte (no. 155).

754 Babies are dedicated by a nnem kinsman in a ceremony, aka'é,
182 before the umbilicus is healed (the évu is believed to enter through the umbilical lesion). A special taboo is imposed on the child, and a part of his body (finger, toe or even foot, hand or whole arm) is symbolically sacrificed to the évu with a slight letting of blood. From that time on, only the shade of the sacrificed part, its semblance, is believed to continue to exist. The child is then nkôman ngbwel /118/, prepared for the ngbwel, but he is not yet a nnem; if he were it would be discovered at the preliminary stage of the adolescent initiation, and he would be put to death. It is only at the time of initiation with the official rites that he becomes a sorcerer, kuli ngbwel, through a further ceremony during which his "godparents" reveal to him that he has been "prepared," dedicated. He must then buy back the bodily part "sacrificed" at the aka'é by offering his "godparents" the body of a member of his family, killed and eaten by the beyem in circumstances about which little is known. What is known suggests some of the sexual aspects of European witches' sabbaths (apparently participants of both sexes, naked, practiced sodomy, 1786
1839 bisôk, and profaned the ancestral relics, probably fragments of biéti). The initiation of an adult consists only of the akuli ngbwel, the aka'é being restricted to children.

754 Beyem meet periodically, aside from initiation ceremonies, in order to "feed the bivu" in anthropophagous or necrophagous meals 781 accompanied by obscene rituals. These meetings take place at the new moon in secret places in the forest, usually in clearings on top of hills or on islands in marshes — mmimie are afraid of stumbling by chance on one of these spots which, according to some of my informants, are guarded between meetings by an aardvark, mvômesila. 825 If such a place is discovered, a nnengani is immediately called in to 755 perform a sort of exorcism.

754 perform a sort of exorcism. Sorcerers seem to be convened to these
 788 meetings by secret messages in the form of bundles of sticks notched
 (211) according to a particular code, or in the form of the quipu. They
 754 are believed to reach the meetings by levitation or by sending only
 774 their nsisim while their bodies remain at home in a state of apparent
 death. This offers a good chance of getting rid of the sorcerer by
 burning his body, the disadvantage being that the nsisim survives, as
 does the évu, and that they than can be incarnated in an animal,
 which cannot happen if the sorcerer is burnt alive.

754 The évu may use various methods of moving about outside the
 774 nnem's body. Sometimes he leaves it in an invisible and immaterial
 825 form, but this method is exceptional. Most often he enters the body
 of an animal, generally a leopard, but sometimes a black snake,
 civet cat, gorilla, or chimpanzee, or even certain insects; the list
 is unlimited, but nearly always the animal in question is powerful or
 dangerous. The carrier-animal is then almost invulnerable, endowed
 both with human intelligence and with the powers of an évu. It is,
 however, possible to strike at it, with luck and good mebian, and any
 injury to the évu rebounds on the sorcerer. On the other hand, injury
 to a sorcerer during the évu's absence is not necessarily fatal to the
 latter, because the évu can survive in the body of the vehicle-animal.
 The latter is called nkuk (1), which can also mean "mask." It is

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1. Among the Ewondo, this term also denotes the good bekôn who appear in dreams to give advice to the living. (J.B.)

not clear whether there is a confusion /119/ with the élañela, as Trilles suggests, or with animal-bekôn, or with those who are beyem on their own account, or even with bingôngôt (bingungure).

754 There seems to exist alongside ngbwel a /kind of/ sorcery connected with abé nlem or mbia nlem, malignity of the heart, and having nothing to do with possession by the bivu. Thus practitioners of kôn, which consists of killing a person while leaving his body alive (see above, p. 134), would not necessarily be beyem in the strict sense. Likewise, many malevolent activities are only criminal deviations from permissible magic. Alliance with an animal, or incarnation in the body of an animal, or even the transformation of a magician into an animal, need not be malevolent or only becomes so

779 Regular or periodic sacrifices are associated with certain
782 fixed occasions, independent of man's will and of chance. These
are: the daily sacrifice, that to the new moon, and that of first
fruits.

Occasional sacrifices are usually blood offerings, accompanied by rites that have earned the name "communional." [507] In almost all these, there is communion through the victim, and all present partake in the sacrifice.

Periodic totemic sacrifices are, on the other hand, rarely bloody or "communional."

In general, the African considers his own interests first. He usually pays rather little attention to his totem, except for certain rites laid down by custom, from which he would not dare to deviate. Thus, every morning, the first wife or most important woman, in the name of the head of the family, anoints with oil the figure upon the box (*évoira biéri*) that contains both the ancestral skulls and the materialized totem. Also, at the time of the new moon, an offering is made to this same *Biéri*, to the ancestors and totem together, the two cults being united in a common gift.

But when a Fan has some favor to ask, wants to acquire something, like a wife, an object, etc., he will hasten to make a sacrifice to the totem. The more urgent the need, and the more important the object, the more substantial will be the sacrifice, ranging from a hen to a human victim, sometimes even to the ritual sacrifice of the chief himself or at least of one of his children.

The sacrifice of thanksgiving does not exist for the Fan; he would view it as "give and take" and he would be astonished if asked to give thanks: he has offered a sacrifice to his totem, the latter has granted his prayer, which means that the totem is satisfied. Why do any more? If a new need arises, then only will it be time to have recourse again to his totem. Meanwhile he had best leave things alone. Each is satisfied with the other.

As for expiatory sacrifice, it is one of the most common. Every time an African has an accident, a misfortune, a calamity, perhaps merely lack of success, he attributes it to his totem's

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Whatever the kind of marriage, the first wife is the only one considered [574] as truly legitimate. As soon as she enters her new hut, her husband leads her by the hand before the évora biéri, which is kept tightly closed. Throughout her life, the wife will never be allowed to look into the box, as that would entail a very grave ritual offense. She now takes a bit of palm oil brought from her own village, mixes it with some from her husband's mother, and rubs this symbolic mixture on the statue on top of the évora. This is a symbol of the fertility she asks of the ancestors and the guardian spirits of the race. She next [782] puts a few grains of maize in a small basket at the base of the statue, so that her future plantations may thrive. This sacrifice should be repeated every morning, but only by the principal wife -- and it is often omitted.

4. Hunting, Fishing, Husbandry

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Before starting on a hunting or fishing expedition, likewise before going out to the first work on his plantation, every family head or warrior will be sure to invoke his totem. He does this first with an offering on the biéri box, then by touching his weapons, tools, or snares against the family totem.

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In the case of hunting, the hunter, when charing his gun, mixes some of the ashes of totemic sacrifice with his small shot, puts his hand on his totem, and leaves confident of the outcome. Even if hunting does not come up to expectation, he would never dream of blaming his totem. He would think that he had had bad luck or, more likely, that he had committed some offense.

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When going fishing, he carries some of the sacrificial ashes hidden in a rag. At the spot he thinks propitious, he always begins by throwing the ashes into the water, in order to obtain his totem's good will.

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Likewise, when a man starts farming, at the beginning of each dry season, before giving the first ax blow to the trees to be cut down, he places some ashes or remnants of sacrifice in some kind of hole and sees to it that they are consumed by the

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● 788 fire which he sets to the felled trees so as to make the necessary
241 fertilizer needed for his future crops. [575]

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779 Returning from hunting or fishing, a man is always sure to put an offering on the évora biéri: it may be a piece of the animal's heart and brain or part of the first fish caught, even the whole fish if it is very small. The first fruits are also placed on the évora. Any infraction of these rites leads to punishment that can only be atoned for by one or more sacrifices. A warrior will infallibly recognize punishment in the failure of hunting or fishing trips or in barren plantations.

The hunting or fishing offering is made by the head of the family, that of first fruits by the first wife.

5. Trade and Palavers

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779 Whenever a Fan has to "talk," he is very careful to try to gain his totem's good will beforehand. On such occasions it is important that he be able to convince his fellow speakers or his adversaries.

The totem ceremony is very short. Before leaving for the palaver or on a trading trip, he removes from the biéri box some of the ashes of the last sacrifice and puts them into a rag, closes the box, and goes off contented.

Before beginning to "talk," he will open the package of ashes and put a bit on his forehead, lips, and throat. Thus the spiritual guardians of the race will aid his brain and inspire him with the best thoughts and the best phrases, and thus they will tell him the best words to use to convince his adversaries and obtain what he wants.

6. Disease and Death

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779 The totemic ceremonies connected with disease and death are of somewhat more consequence. As soon as a man falls gravely ill, the practitioner is called in. He demands in advance, to be on the safe side, the proper payment for his pains, and then

8: Bennett D-5 (ca. 1898) 1899 FH9 Fang FH9

Journal of the Anthropological Institute (N.S.), Vol. II, Plate XIV.

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1 and 2, Ngi masks used in the Fang Secret Society; 3, 4, Fang idols; 5, Wooden dogbell
6, Ngi collar; 7, Sacrifice knife.

[p. 66(A)]